



Does Your Loved One Have a Substance Abuse Problem?

If your loved one has a drug or alcohol problem, he or she might:

Become increasingly defensive about his or her drinking or drug use. The more an addict or alcoholic is confronted with his substance abuse, the more he feels the need to defend his actions. Your loved one may get secretive, defensive, or even blame you for the need to drink or get high, telling you that it is all your fault.

Suddenly become secretive over money and finances. Your loved one might show a new desire to control household finances, or there might increasingly be a lack of money despite the same income and expenses. Savings and assets might mysteriously dwindle, or there may be unexplained loans or cash advances.

Become increasingly desperate for money to buy drugs or alcohol or to spend on going out “partying.” Credit card bills may increase, or your loved one may ask friends and family for money. Jewelry or other items easily pawned for money may mysteriously disappear.

If your family member has a substance abuse problem, you may have many conflicting emotions. You may try to cover up for a loved one or spend a lot of time and energy trying to keep him or her from drinking or using drugs. At the same time, you might be furious at your loved one for using again and be tired of trying

to keep up the charade. As much as you may want to, and as hard as it is seeing the effects, you cannot make someone stop drinking or drugging. The final choice is up to him or her.

Ironically, one of the best ways to help a drug addict or alcoholic is to help yourself. You have a right to protect yourself emotionally and financially. Don't blame yourself for the addict's problems. The right support can help you make positive choices for yourself, and balance encouraging your loved one to get help without losing yourself in the process.

Tips for Family Members of Addicts and Alcoholics

Don't go it alone. It can feel so overwhelming coping with a loved one's addiction that it may seem easier to rationalize his or her requests and problems “this one last time.” Or you might feel ashamed, feeling like you are the only one who has problems like this. Reaching out for support will make you realize that many families have struggled with this problem. There is help available in your local community. Look in the Yellow Pages under Alcoholism or Addiction for treatment programs and self-help groups.

Call your county health department and ask for licensed treatment programs in your community. Keep trying until you find the right help for your loved one, yourself, and your family. Ask a family therapist for a referral to a trained interventionist, or call the Intervention Resource Center at 1-888-421-4321.

Set boundaries in managing money. If a loved one is serious about getting help for addiction, it may help if you take over the family finances to make sure the addict/alcoholic stays accountable and to prevent relapse. However, this does not mean that you are responsible for micro-managing your loved one's impulses to drink or get high. Your first responsibilities are to ensure that your own finances and credit are not at risk.

Consider how you will handle requests for money. Addicts and alcoholics often become very good at asking for money, either directly or indirectly. They may use pleading, manipulation, or even threats and blaming to get it. It takes time and practice to learn how you will respond to these requests to ensure that you are not enabling the addict, but that you are keeping your own dignity intact.

When drug addicts and alcoholics are feeling hopeless, the risk of suicide is high. It's very important to take any thoughts or talk of suicide seriously. If you or someone you care about is suicidal, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-TALK**.

Children Need Help Too!

Children in families experiencing alcohol or drug abuse need attention, guidance, and support. They may be growing up in homes in which the problems are either denied or covered up. These children need to have their experiences validated. They

also need safe, reliable adults in whom to confide and who will support them, reassure them, and provide them with appropriate help for their age. They need to have fun and just be kids.

Families with alcohol and drug problems usually have high levels of stress and confusion. High-stress family environments are a risk factor for early and dangerous substance use, as well as mental and physical health problems. It is important to talk honestly with children about what is happening in the family and to help them express their concerns and feelings.

Children need to trust the adults in their lives and to believe that they will support them. Children living with alcohol or drug abuse in the family can benefit from participating in educational support groups in their school student assistance programs. Those aged 11 and older can join Alateen groups, which meet in community settings and provide healthy connections with others coping with similar issues. For more information on Alateen visit www.Alateen.org. Being associated with the activities of a faith community can also help.

For more information, visit:

- National Association for Children of Alcoholics—www.nacoa.org
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence—www.ncadd.org

To help us combat substance abuse, go to www.LiveDrugFree.org and click on "Donate!"